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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 004259

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NSC STAFF FOR SINGH  
DRL/IRF FOR COFSKY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/10/2026

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM KIRF EG

SUBJECT: MUSLIM-BORN CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY ALLEGED GOE  
HARASSMENT, PERSECUTION

REF: CAIRO 2201

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Stuart Jones for  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Egypt's small community of Christians who have converted from Islam are subject to periodic harassment and occasional persecution by elements of the Egyptian security service. Recent discussions with members of this community, who identify themselves as "Muslim-born Believers" (MBB), shed light on the controversial status of this small community. End summary.

¶2. (C) The exact size of the MBB community is impossible to determine. Estimates range from dozens to several hundred to the low thousands. In a late 2005 research trip to the region, a Human Rights Watch researcher (protect) told poloff that he had been surprised by the high number of Muslim-born converts to Christianity that he met in Cairo and Alexandria.

HRW is currently drafting a report on the Egyptian national identity card system, which requires citizens to self-identify as Jew, Christian, or Muslim. Although Egyptian law does not prohibit conversion away from Islam, Muslim-born citizens re-registering as Christians complain of consistent bureaucratic opposition from working levels of the GOE.

Bahaa Al-Accad: A Repentant Islamist

¶3. (C) Since mid 2005, we have received reports of an MBB detainee, Bahaa El-Din El-Accad, an engineer in his late fifties who was once a member of the outlawed Islamist Group, Gamaa Al-Islamia. (Other accounts have linked Accad to the Tabligh El-Dawa group.) According to a Christian activist who seeks to convert Muslims, SSIS detained Accad in April 2005. According to the activist, Accad had professed his conversion to Christianity shortly before his 2005 detention. For the past 14 months, Accad has been held without charge pending investigation for unnamed crimes. Initially detained at an SSIS facility in Dokki, Accad has more recently been detained at the Tora Prison complex. In late April 2006, Accad was moved from Tora Farm Prison (generally used to house political detainees such as Ayman Nour) to Tora Liman Prison (alleged to be a facility used for Islamist prisoners).

¶4. (C) Another young MBB who converted to Christianity as a teenager in 1999 has subsequently become engaged to Accad's daughter. According to this young MBB, Accad suffers from various health problems, including high blood pressure and dizzy spells, and is fearful that his Islamist fellow prisoners may harm him. Accad's growing frustration at his

detention has led him in recent weeks to seek greater publicity. He has asked his supporters to share his story with the Egyptian media, and that poloff include the details of his case in the 2006 International Religious Freedom Report. In response to poloff's inquiry, the young MBB, without elaboration, that there are 500 MBBs in Cairo, and 2,000-3,000 across Egypt.

¶15. (C) Post informally raised Bahaa Al-Accad's detention on several occasions with the Human Rights Department at the MFA. MFA Director for Human Rights Ihab Gamaleldin responded on June 18 that Accad is not being detained due to alleged conversion from Islam to Christianity--which Gamaleldin asserted was both permissible and possible under Egyptian law. According to Gamaleldin, the GOE security services are in fact detaining Accad while they investigate charges that he has "defamed heavenly religions" under Article 98(F) of the penal code. According to Gamaleldin, Accad sees himself as a new prophet who is "advocating for a new religion" and calling for equality among faiths. Gamaleldin, reading from notes presumably supplied by State Security, said that Accad had "insulted Islam and the Quran" and was "actively undermining and deliberately falsifying both Christianity and Islam." Gamaleldin asserted that Accad had been investigated and briefly detained in 1998 under similar charges. Upon his release in 1998, he had resumed his activities "which infringe on public order."

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A Hebrew Language Student  
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¶16. (C) Since December 2005, poloff has met several times with another MBB who initially came to Post's attention after a DRL/IRF referral. His story has been corroborated by our

conversations with other contacts. This individual told poloff that officers from the State Security Investigations Service (SSIS) had detained him near his home on December 1, in 6th of October City, and kept him in custody until the evening of December 3 and believes that his status as a convert was the reason for his detention. During the detention, a SSIS officer named Yusuf maintained a generally polite and respectful approach to individual, as he asked detailed questions about associates. Yusuf became angry and punched him on the shoulder and back when refused to become a paid SSIS informant. Yusuf eventually told the individual late on December 3 that he was free to go, but kept his national ID card and told him that "We will meet again."

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Penalizing Christians Who Seek to Convert Muslims: Kamal and Lavinia Munir  
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¶17. (C) In April 2005, a Romanian citizen, Lavinia Zah attempted to return to Egypt with her infant son. Immigration authorities at Cairo International Airport detained her and the baby for 26 hours before eventually deporting them. Her husband, Kamal, told poloff that he believes that he and his wife are being punished because of his work at Maadi Community Church fielding inquiries from Muslims who express an interest in church activities, good works, and conversion. When Kamal and Romanian consular officials approached the GOE, they were told that Lavinia was being held on unspecified charges.

¶18. (C) Kamal has engaged prominent human rights lawyer Amir Salem (who also served on the Ayman Nour defense team) to sue the GOE to allow Lavinia and their young son to return to Egypt. In the course of pursuing his case against the GOE, Kamal received copies of court documents, which he shared with poloff, in which SSIS noted that Lavinia Zah is barred from entering Egypt due to charges that she has "defamed Egypt abroad." Kamal requested reference to his family's case in the 2006 International Religious Freedom Report, but requested that we not use his full name so as not to draw any undue attention to his family in Egypt.

